

The Crambo

Volume 1

Article 3

4-3-2018

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Recommended Citation

Stephens, Sakura C. (2018) "The Fishbowl," *The Crambo*: Vol. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/thecrambo/vol1/iss1/3>

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THE FISHBOWL

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On my bookshelf, nestled among textbooks about art and melodious quotes scribbled on cardstock, is a large glass globe. It is precisely one gallon in capacity and has contained many different goldfish over the years, but today, it remains empty. I have always been fascinated by goldfish. As a child, my memories are flooded with silver and gold fluid forms silently swirling and dancing weightlessly as I watched mesmerized for hours. Goldfish are a large part of Japanese culture, and I remember my daily treks to school through the village, passing by various bodies of water, each housing a mysterious and beautiful world of free-spirits and flowing fins. I knew each and every spot on my way to school that hid one of these magical worlds - usually contained in large stone vases covered with moss outside the front door or ponds with bonsai trees and lily pads giving shade and rest to these delicate sprites.

One of my favorite daily routines was summoning the carp. My friends and I would pass by a beautiful marble encased pond with a Japanese bridge overlooking a dark abyss of water. As I leaned over the hollow bronze rails, we would beat on them with our umbrellas, clap our hands and otherwise create a commotion as one, two, twenty bright hues of orange and gold would emerge from the depths of darkness. Within seconds, the dark green waters would be transformed into a ballet of graceful dancers performing the most elegant arabesque to the beat of our hands. As we conducted this exquisite performance, the fish soon realized that there was no food being thrown to them, and so they would disperse back to the shady coolness out of sight. Of course, carp are such forgiving creatures, so we were able to beckon them every morning as though they had completely forgotten their appearance was in vain the day before.

The omatsuri, or festivals, are flurries of brightly lit orbs, colorfully bold happy, and explosions of brilliant color in the night sky. The beat of the taiko drums resonates powerfully enough to move anyone's spirit as the flutes play ancient melodies of celebration. I remember coming home from these events with bags of goldfish - black fish with big bubbly eyes, white pearls with red-orange spots on their foreheads, and glittery golden fish with elegant fantails. I had to work so hard to

catch these ephemeral beings, and they would slip through the paper net as I concentrated to capture them. Once my hard earned winnings were securely home, they were placed in a plastic tub, where I would sit and watch them tirelessly for hours. One by one, their delicate bodies would float to the top of the water, and I would have an empty world once again.

My parents realized my fascination with fish, so in the fourth grade, I was given a ten-gallon fish tank. This tank replaced the spot where our TV used to sit, and I remember listening to Carlos Santana's "Flor de Luna" as I curled up on the floor and fell asleep next to my own small universe. Growing up in a tumultuous household with abuse and fighting wreaked havoc on my nerves, and I found myself struggling with OCD and anxiety from a very young age. As the world whirled around me, I always found calm and stillness in my little crystalline wonderland of beings that depended on me, oblivious to my existence. Watching an entire ecosystem happening inside of a transparent box enchanted me, and the fact that it was contained in such a small space gave me a sense of peace and control over my own life.

Throughout college, I carried with me the fish tank and my one-gallon fishbowl as I packed and moved to various dorm rooms and apartments. Moving is already strenuous without the burden of a fracturable cosmos to deal with, but I insisted on taking these aerial beings with me wherever I relocated to, often resulting in a few casualties. Being a twenty-something has proved to be a sort of "mental puberty", always changing, transitioning and chaotic.

To escape it all, I would immerse myself in a carefree and weightless meditation into their world, gazing for hours on end at how graceful, how effortlessly they glided about. They did not worry about anything and freely drifted and sailed without any burden to hinder their flow. They were completely content being who they were, not concerned with their needs being met, what relationships were on brink of ending, or even if they had another day of life. Watching my goldfish removed me from the tornado going on in my own life, allowing me to enjoy the still simplicity of just being a beautiful part of creation. I realized how unnatural it is to worry, and that in fact, the only things on this earth that worry are human beings. Worry has only shortened the lives of many at best and has taken away moments of joy and living that will never be able to be regained. What would my life have been like if I had been a goldfish? I will never know and worrying about it would not help me understand any better.

Years have gone by and after my last goldfish, Goldie II, passed away, I could not bear the

responsibility of transporting these sensitive organisms to and fro whenever I picked up and moved. I finally accepted that my life was too transitional to be sloshing a world out of order every year that I uprooted myself and replanted. Strangely, I still scrupulously wrap my glass bowl every time I pack, and as I unpack, always find myself polishing it and placing it in view although it remains vacant. I moved across the country this fall and was forced to confront what items I chose to leave behind for the sake of fitting everything into my small trailer. I tossed out my bed, clothing, shoes, and books, but I did not think twice about keeping my fish bowl. It was only when I began unpacking and decorating my room when I realized how peculiar it was that I persisted to display this vacuous sphere which served absolutely no purpose. I keep dreaming of having my little piece of calm again. I have a plan to fill the space back up with clean water, new rocks and fresh plants so that I can go to a pet store and hand-select the most exquisite shimmering inhabit for the new world I created. I guess I'm just waiting for the perfect time: After the break, before the summer, after the next move, or when I know I'm going to be settled for longer than a year. For now, it serves as a reminder of a quiet hideaway where worrying ceases to exist. I have the fishbowl waiting - the little world at my fingertips, always ready to be filled with an entire microcosm of beauty and wonder.